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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Community Resistance Against Al-Shabaab

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Local residents and militias in Galgaduud Region are bracing for an al-Shabaab reprisal attack to recapture the towns of Guriel and Dhusamareb. Between December 27 and 30, a community-based resistance movement defeated al-Shabaab in battles that killed several top commanders of the insurgent group (Ref A). On January 16, key leaders from Galgaduud told us that elders and religious leaders mobilized militias to counter the al-Shabaab threat. These community based armed groups maintain control over Guriel and Dhusamareb. The leaders appealed for urgent humanitarian assistance for thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) outside the towns where clashes occurred. They also requested financial support to avert an imminent al-Shabaab counter attack. The moderate group Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ) continues to rally support against al-Shabaab in both Galgaduud and Mogadishu. Communities continue to rally behind the ASWJ moniker, though the group itself does not claim to have a fighting force. The Mogadishu-based ASWJ spokesman told us the network of religious scholars and their adherents are seeking partnerships with the U.S. to fight al-Shabaab and violent extremism. The influence of ASWJ religious leaders continues to be credited with playing a key role in maintaining the peace in Somalia's capital and to subverting al-Shabaab's strategy to tighten the noose on Mogadishu by controlling surrounding regions. End Summary.

Victory Over al-Shabaab Threatened

12. (SBU) Community-based militias in Galgaduud Region continue to control the towns of Guriel and Dhusamareb after a decisive victory in over al-Shabaab between December 27 and 30 (Ref A). During the battles, several al-Shabaab top commanders were killed and now the communities fear reprisal attacks. Some the al-Shabaab commanders reportedly killed in the clashes include General Mohamed Yusuf Nur (Hawiye/Sheikhal), commander in chief, Mohamed Said "Tima Jilaa" (Hawiye/Murasade), chief of staff, Abdullahi "Fanah" (Darod/Ogadeni), field commander and trainer, Kanja Waweru "Seyfulaah al-Kiywaani" (Kenyan), and Ruben Shumpert "Amir Abdul Muhaimeen" (American). According to multiple sources, al-Shabaab is in the process of re-organizing and training in El Bur, also in Galgaduud Region, to launch a counter-offensive in Guriel and Dhusamareb.

13. (SBU) On January 16, we met with key Galgaduud political leaders including General Mohamed Nuur Galaal, Acting Chairman of the Ayr political committee and a well-respected military general under Siad Barre. Galaal served as a military commander in the Transitional National Government (TNG) and presidential security advisor to the

TNG president. One of the other representatives was Salad Osman, member of the Ayr political committee and former minister and MP within the TNG Somali politician in pre-1991 government where he served as a member of parliament for 12 years. The Hawiye/Haber Gedir/Ayr leaders told us the decisive victories in Guriel and Dhusamareb over al-Shabaab were won by a combined force of Ayr militias belonging to former clan administrations, and youth recruited from surrounding rural areas. They estimated that approximately 500 militia fought against al-Shabaab in Dhusamareb and another 800 in Guriel where fighting was most intense.

14. (SBU) According to the Ayr leaders, the popular uprising occurred after local ASWJ clerics and clan elders agreed to fight against al-Shabaab's targeted violence and its imposition of "foreign teachings and non-Somali Islamic traditions" on the community. The community resistance was precipitated by al-Shabaab's forceful expulsion of local administrations formed by resident communities. They told us the militias were stood up after elders urgently appealed to local youth and the "camel herders" who are "natural warriors and fighters for hire." However, the representatives stressed to us that the forces were not formally organized and they have no means for sustainment. While at present these militias continue to control Guriel and Dhusamareb, they said that without outside support "it is a matter of time before al-Shabaab attacks and moves back in."

Appeal for Humanitarian Aid,  
Immediate Response  
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15. (SBU) While the armed militias are in the towns, most of the

NAIROBI 00000116 002 OF 003

residents have fled into neighboring rural areas. The clashes in Galgaduud produced thousands of IDPs. They told us that those who were displaced from their homes live in squalid conditions in the outskirts of the towns and that the majority of the people in Galgaduud region are those who came to the region in an attempt to escape from violence in Mogadishu. With the recent round of violence, they are displaced from their homes yet again. The community leaders appealed to us for urgent humanitarian assistance for these IDPs. They told us that since al-Shabaab was forced to flee the area, they are in the position (at least in the near term) to ensure access for and urgent aid delivery. This humanitarian relief will restore hope and trust in the new local administrations formed in Dhusamareb and Guriel, they said.

16. (SBU) We followed up with the World Food Program (WFP) to encourage the relief organization to address the needs of this community. The WFP representative told us that their information indicates that the majority of the IDPs went back to their homes in Dhusamareb and Guriel. WFP is targeting the two towns because of the ongoing humanitarian emergency, as defined by the Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU). At present, a double ration of food is on its way to both towns targeting over 48,000 recipients in Guriel and over 51,648 in Dhusamareb. We contacted the Ayr leaders to inform them of the upcoming delivery, and they expressed deep appreciation for U.S. efforts in the region.

Moderate Islamic Network Keeping Peace  
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17. (SBU) The victories in Dhusamareb were attributed to the moderate ASWJ group. ASWJ is the name adopted by members of the Sufi sect promoting the moderate brand of Islam to which a majority of Somalis belong. It is not a fighting force, but a network that has been instrumental in recent community uprisings against al-Shabaab. (Note: Reftel discusses our recent engagement with the group). On January 17, we talked with the Mogadishu-based ASWJ executive committee who confirmed to us that theirs is not an armed group. In recent weeks, a number of groups, including the community-based militias in Galgaduud and Gedo regions claimed to be fighting against al-Shabaab in the name of ASWJ. Widely reported media stories have linked al-Shabaab losses to ASWJ). Following these claims, ASWJ issued a public statement to clarify that it is not a

fighting force but does advocate for the return to traditional religious practice.

¶8. (SBU) Sheikh Abdiqadir Somow, ASWJ Spokesman and acting chairman told us that ASWJ opposes al-Shabaab because of their "corrupt" view of Islam and oppressive ways and that ASWJ is willing to defend a "Somali" brand of Islam at all costs. Somow said ASWJ will continue to condemn al-Shabaab, sensitizing local communities about the risks of involvement with the insurgent group. Sheikh Somow told us that ASWJ is composed of 250 central and 13 executive committee members and its adherents represent 95 percent of Somalia's population. In recent weeks, many groups, both unarmed and armed, have identified themselves with ASWJ and Somow aid they are doing their best to positively channel the momentum behind this sentiment.

#### Engaging the Djibouti Process

¶9. (SBU) Sheikh Somow told us their clerics have been deeply engaged in raising public awareness and support for peace in Mogadishu (Ref B). He requested partnership with the US Government and financial support to further enable the network to counter al-Shabaab and its negative influence. He said ASWJ intends to intensify anti-violence messages in mosques, public gatherings and through the media but are faced with resource constraints. When we asked about ASWJ's relationship with the Djibouti process, Somow said they welcomed Sheikh Sharif when he returned to Mogadishu and urged followers to peacefully engage with the ARS leader. Somow told us he personally mobilized community support for the Djibouti agreement, though many do not see its application at the local level.

¶10. (SBU) We also asked the representatives from Dhusamareb about the Djibouti process and they initially responded that for them, the Djibouti process is positive, but is not grounded in the daily realities on the ground. While there are representatives participating in the discussions from the region, they are removed from the present dangers in Dhusamareb and Guriel. At the same time,

NAIROBI 00000116 003 OF 003

they highlighted that al-Shabaab's defeat prevented the group from gaining influence, thus opening space for dialogue and reconciliation. In a January 19 conversation with Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Abdisalam Adan, he told us that he has been in close contact with the community leaders in Dhusamareb and Guriel and is planning to stand up a local joint security sub-committee in each of the communities that will interface with other local and regional sub-committees, eventually coordinating with the Joint Security Committee.

#### Comment

¶11. (SBU) The recent community-level engagement to combat al-Shabaab in Galgaduud and efforts secure peace in Mogadishu by ASWJ and others is promising. However, all of our interlocutors emphasized the tenuous nature of this peace and some expect that it might be the calm before a storm. They all warned that al-Shabaab is preparing to strike back, and though their general position may be weakened in the wake of the ongoing Ethiopian withdrawal, many asserted that the insurgent group has the resources to launch a considerable attack. In Mogadishu, however, our contacts told us that al-Shabaab has weak footing. After a recent strike on AMISOM, community leaders warned that they would deal directly with anyone launching an attack against the African mission, stating clearly that AMISOM forces do not equate to Ethiopian forces. Post will continue to engage with ASWJ and other community-based groups.

RANNEBERGER